

[REVEREND ANDREW M.]

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A DISCOURSE
ON THE
ASSASSINATION OF
PRESIDENT LINCOLN,

DELIVERED IN THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

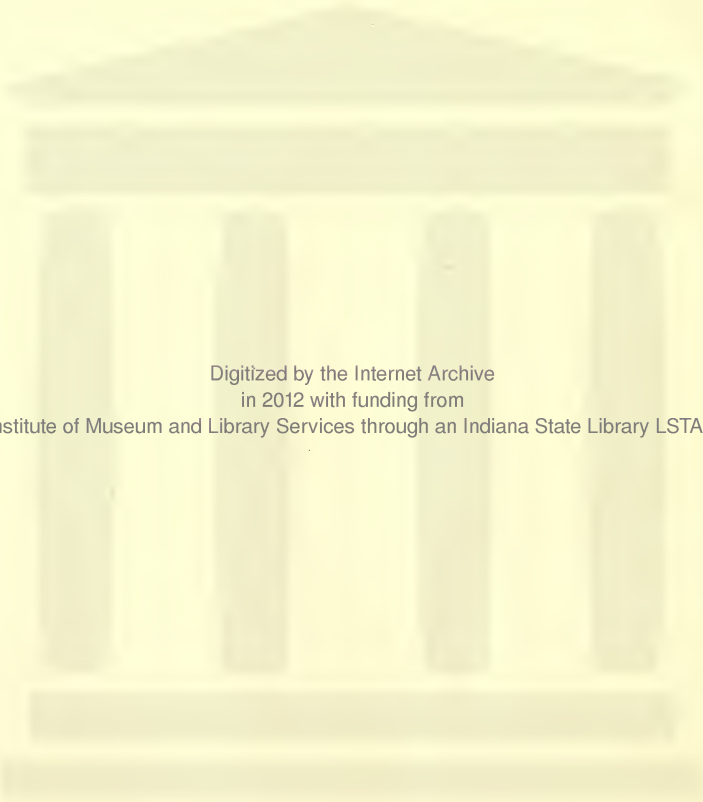
Lansingburgh, N. Y.,

ON SABBATH EVENING, APRIL 16, 1865,

BY REV. A. M. BEVERIDGE.

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SERMON.

Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel.—2D SAMUEL, III : 38.

Abraham Lincoln, our honored and beloved Chief Magistrate, is dead! He fell, murdered by the hand of a dark-minded malignant assassin, in one of the places of public concourse, in the city of Washington, the Capital of the Nation.

A great man—and good, has thus fallen in our American Israel—a man, who, notwithstanding all the disadvantages of his youth and earlier manhood, and all the infirmities and faults of his nature, inseparable from our humanity, will stand hereafter, side by side with the immortal Washington—his compeer in sagacity, in wisdom, in integrity, honesty, firmness, kindness of heart, and in all those virtues and elements of manhood which are essential to constitute true greatness, or true nobility of character; and his name will live, so long as that of Washington himself shall live—the one, acknowledged and revered as the

Father of his country, and the other, as the instrument in God's hand, of her deliverance and preservation.

That so wise, and so good a man was, in the Providence of The Most High, summoned to the helm of the ship of state, in the season of her extremest peril—when her very life, and all the inestimable blessings, with which she was freighted, were in jeopardy, demands of us the gratitude of our hearts and the praise of our lips, even in this dark hour of our sorrow; and that this noble helmsman, to whom was committed such vast treasures—even a nation's weal—has so skillfully piloted the precious laden bark through so many storms, and tempests, and breakers, has not only excited the admiration and the applause of the ten thousand interested and anxious witnesses of his wisdom and his power to master difficulties, but it has again and again, and times without number, evoked from the loyal heart of the nation this fervent prayer: *God bless Abraham Lincoln! God bless Abraham Lincoln!*

But the faithful helmsman—the man whom the people delighted to honor, and in whose hand and head and heart they so confidently trusted, has been stricken down at his post—stricken down when the long-tossed vessel, after out-riding so many storms and escaping unnumbered dangers,

seemed to be just entering the long sought haven of peace; and now, the nation, whose lips were opening to give utterance to the merited plaudit, "Well done. good and faithful servant,"—and whose hands were prepared to crown him with garlands of honor, is all so suddenly bathed in tears of sorrow, and draped in the habiliments of woe.

Never since the first fatal gun was fired, on that sweet April morning, four years ago, upon Fort Sumter, and whose reverberations peeled with such wild dismay, through the length and breadth of the land, has this nation's heart been so profoundly moved, and so overwhelmed with unaffected sorrow, as when with yesterday's sun, there came speeding in quick succession over the electric wires the sad announcements—"The President of the United States has been assassinated"—"The President is dying"—"The President is dead!"

The news of this terrible catastrophe fell like a stunning blow upon the head of the people—producing everywhere the profoundest indignation and horror—paralyzing for the time, the very senses, and exciting emotion too deep for utterance; or which, if it found utterance at all, only in sad emphatic monosyllables—a silent grasp of the hand, or in unbidden and resistless tears.

Nor is it a wonder that there was experienced such a paralysis of feeling and such unutterable consternation and woe. The shock was too great and too sudden to be otherwise. The nation's heart was all alive and aglow with the joy of victory. Her authority had been nobly vindicated. The majesty of justice and of law had triumphed over treason and lawlessness. The proud army and the last hope of the rebellion, had been driven in dismay from behind her strong fortifications—the Capital of the bastard and iniquitous Confederacy been evacuated—her Chief Ruler and masterspirit had fled as a frightened fugitive from the scourge of justice—the vaunted leader of the rebel hosts with his chivalric followers and all their paraphernalia of war, been captured or slain;—and as the result of such unbounded success, the bright dawn of an early and blessed peace was hailed by a happy and overjoyed people; and they were ready, in the abundance of their good will, to grant it upon the easiest of terms. To officers and to soldiers of the overpowered foe—blood-red as were their hands with foulest murder,—the most humane and lenient terms of surrender were given; and the loving arms of the nation, as if wholly forgetful of all the wrong that had been done her and her children, were thrown wide open, to take back

to her bosom and to her heart, her alienated and erring brethren; and she was ready to re-invest them with all the privileges, immunities, and honors of American Citizenship, aye, and seemingly ready, in the overflowing kindness of her heart, to kill for them the fatted calf, and to rejoice with special joy, that the wanderers had returned, and the lost were found; and now, just in the midst of all this good feeling and these joyous prospects, when the pulse of the nation's hope is beating so high, and all the sad calamities of four long years of the most sanguinary war are about to culminate in the blessing of peace and the reciprocal feeling and advantages of a united brotherhood; we are startled and appalled by the unexpected intelligence, that this monster of rebellion, fairly and justly beaten on his own chosen field of contest, but spared from utter destruction, in order that it might finally be subdued by the moral force of christian kindness, has, in its last death agony, and true to its fiendish nature still, turned and struck with a murderous hand at the very heart of the nation in the person of its chief and most honored ruler.

It is a fitting climax to the barbarities and infernal malignity of a slaveholder's rebellion! Dark as the deed is, it ought not to have been unlooked for; and it was not by many who

knew better the animus of the foe. It is the legitimate outgrowth of the system of human oppression, and of a war which was begun, and has been carried on for the accursed purpose of enslaving mankind. It may be a deed, unapproved by all the South, and even by all that have been engaged in this unholy rebellion. For humanity's sake, I trust that it is—but to a people so corrupt and hardened and lost to all the nobler principles of humanity, that they could sacrifice the peace and prosperity of the nation which had been their protection, and professedly their pride—that could wade through rivers of blood for the inglorious privilege of extending the area of human bondage, and to live and fatten upon the unrequited toil of poor, degraded, brutalized bondmen and bond women; aye, and that could so defy and trample upon all the laws of civilized warfare and outrage humanity itself, as to deliberately and systematically starve and murder, inch by inch, sixty thousand free-men, for the sake of accomplishing their hellish design; to such a people, this last masterly stroke of iniquity, this dastardly blow, at the foremost champion of human rights and liberty, will not be an ungrateful, nor an unapplauded deed.

It will send, doubtless, a thrill of joy through all the dark realms of disloyalty, north as well

as south; aye, and through all the realms of darkness beneath, where this foul plot and the foul rebellion itself originated; even as it has already sent a thrill of anguish to every loyal heart throughout the land; and as it will yet send to every liberty-loving heart throughout the civilized world. It will be chuckled over in secret; it will be gleefully repeated at the fireside and in the haunts of the enemy; be dignified, by printer's ink, into an act of noble daring, or the sublimity of moral heroism, and applauded by thousands upon thousands, as the very acme of poetic justice. Poets themselves will celebrate it in song—orators will find parallels upon the page of history, or even liken the perpetrator of the horrid crime, who for the good of his imperilled country, stabbed the mighty Cæsar for his ambition, upon the steps of the Senate-house of Rome; and purblind and corrupt priests, calling themselves the ministers of our holy Religion, will point to it as a noteworthy example of the retributive justice, or avenging wrath of God; and priest and people, in the exuberance of their delight, will together clap their hands and cry, *Amen!* or even joining in the mock heroism of the red-handed murderer, as he brandishes his glittering steel in the face of that horror-stricken audience where the dam-

ning deed was done, will shout—" *Sic semper tyrannis*"—*So let it ever be to tyrants.*

But no words of apology or, of extenuation—no high-wrought, illusive imagery, or illustrious example gathered from classic lore—no labored effort of poet, author, orator or priest, can avail to change the nature of the crime; and nothing which they can say or do, will serve to obliterate, or to cover up the stain of its damnable guilt. "The offence is rank—it smells to heaven—it hath worse than the primal eldest curse upon it—and there is not rain enough in yon sweet heavens to wash it white as snow." It is done. The pen of history will record it—record it in all its fearful blackness—and record it to the eternal dishonor and shame, not only of the vile perpetrator of the bloody deed, but of all who have sunk so far into the depths of human depravity, and are so wanting, in the nobler instincts and feelings of our humanity, as to be capable of abetting, and sympathizing with such monster of iniquity.

I know not, whether such enemies, blinded, prejudiced, maddened as they are, even to desperation, will ever be able to discover the enormity of this crime which they have thus added to the long, dark catalogue of their other sins. Passion which has so perverted and destroyed their moral

vision, may still continue to pervert, and hide it from their eyes. But if I mistake not, the time is coming, when it will repent them that they have done this deed—when they will wish, oh! how much—that it were undone—because of its return to curse the doers—converting their fiendish laughter and joy, into bitter lamentations and wailings of woe. I could wish, for their sakes, as well as ours, that it had never been done; for have they not to fear—will they not find when too late to repent, that the little finger of the murdered one's successor will be thicker than the loins of "Father Abraham;" and that whereas, this gentle-hearted father of his people, so lenient and so kind, that he could hardly chastise his rebellious children with whips; his official substitute, schooled to severity in the fires which their own madness had kindled and fostered; and sustained as he will be by the temper of an outraged and indignant people, shall hereafter chastise them *with scorpions*? But it is too late now for selfishness to put on the sackcloth of repentance. The camel's back is broken. The foul deed which calls for severity, if not vengeance, has been committed, and cannot, if it would, be recalled—nor can the consequences be averted. As they have sown to the wind, so must they reap the whirlwind.

And no more can it be recalled by us, however much we may regret it, or sorrow over it. The hand that did the deed, did it as effectually for us as for them. And strange as, at first thought, it may seem, it was done under the Providence of that God, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will—and to whom the faith of this great nation has been looking in her dangerous extremity for guidance—and in whom she has trusted, and not in vain, for help. It is an unexpected, startling, mysterious and most trying Providence. It is so mysterious and so sudden—even as the stroke of the thunderbolt—and withal so contravenes all our plans, desires and hopes, that it is hard to gracefully submit, or to say, at this hour, from the depths of the heart, “Thy will, O God, be done.” But still we must submit—*must* and *ought*. God’s will be done; and what are we that we should rebel against his government? Let us, therefore, instead of fighting against God, or of indulging a spirit of complaint, or sinking down into despair, aim to possess and to cherish that frame of mind which will enable us, not only to bow with the profoundest reverence before Him, but to be resigned to this dark dispensation of His ever wise and ever holy Providence.

And that we may be thus reconciled to that supreme will, which orders and disposes all events

of this world, both great and small; let us remember that although a great and good man has fallen in our Israel, he fell not until he had done a *great work*—a *work* which has made glad the hearts of millions of poor bondmen in our own and other lands; and the hearts of all, who love righteousness, justice, liberty and truth, throughout the earth. His life therefore has not been in vain. It indeed has scarcely fallen to the lot of one poor mortal to devise and to execute so much for humanity and for God. His name stands enrolled to-day, among the foremost of earth's benefactors. Had there been more work for him to do—work which he would have done better than any one else, he had doubtless been left to complete it. But there was not. His mission—though to us it may seem prematurely ended—was fulfilled; and God, who never errs, as to time, or place, or event, called his chosen laborer home; and he has passed, as we believe to his reward on high—and “his works do follow him.” Let us therefore devoutly thank God, the great and good Giver; thank him for the *work* done, and that it has been so *well done*.

But in this dark hour of our national calamity, let us not only seek to be thankful for the many favors of the past, and submission for the present and for the future, but let us aim to benefit by the

lessons which this afflictive Providence, when properly interpreted, inculcates. Not to be made wiser, and better, by such Providences, as that over which we mourn to-day, is to despise the chastening of the Lord and to provoke anew his wrath.

And First, let us learn, as individuals, and as a people, to be *humble*, and to *know that the Lord is God*; and that we are not, therefore, to boast of our own wisdom and strength—and not to put confidence in princes, or in an arm of flesh, but in the arm of the living God; for he only is great, and wise, and Almighty. “Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?” “Trust ye in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” “Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land.” Is it not thus that the voice of the Lord is heard speaking to us, and to this whole people, as they sit mourning, to-day, over the loss of the great and good man who has fallen in our Isreal?

But does not this Providence also teach us, as a people, to be *just* as well as *merciful*? Have we not, or had not, the nation forgotten, or was she not in danger of forgetting, that there is something due to the majesty of law—to God’s unreppealed statutes and the great law of *public right*,

as well as to the sweet law of kindness and of love. It is true, that the law of Christian benevolence directs and requires us to "love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us;"—and we would not detract one jot, or tittle, from that law of mercy; but there is given to it a *false* interpretation, and an application essentially wrong, and decidedly disastrous in its tendencies, and effects upon public morals, and the well being of the State, if it be supposed to inculcate, or to encourage that mawkish sensibility, or that attenuated, weak and shadowy sentimentalism which is shocked at the idea of punishment; or if it be supposed that the laws of Christian justice can be sacrificed to that sickly humanitarianism which is so lenient in its dealing with public offenders, that it would suffer every graceless villain, or every violator of the great law of right, whatever the turpitude of his crime, to escape with impunity. And yet, what was the popular cry but yesterday, or before the news of this sorrowful event, so distinctly revealing the true animus of the rebellion, broke upon the ears and struck upon the heart of this great people? Everywhere almost, North and South, East and West, from the pulpit and from the press, and in the street, there

were heard spoken in words and tones, softer than those of Christian charity itself, sentiments like this: "Let these red-handed traitors go—*all go*—‘scot free.’" They would, it is true, if they could, have pulled down this grand fabric of free institutions, and erected upon its ruins another edifice whose chief corner stone was human slavery; but what of that? They have in their mad effort to rule and to destroy, caused the death of five hundred thousand of their fellow countrymen, the life of each one of which was as dear and as valuable as their own; but what of that? They have, with a demon-like cruelty, literally starved out of life sixty thousand unfortunate prisoners of war, guilty of no greater offence than that of taking up arms in the name of liberty, and to defend the rich and free inheritance bequeathed to them as the dying legacy of their fathers; but what of that? They have sold into slavery, or massacred, in cold blood, soldiers whose misfortune it is to have a darker skin than their own; conscripted and imprisoned law-abiding Unionists, driven defenceless women and children as fugitives from their homes, or burned their roof-tree over them;—and withal brought desolation and woe to almost every hearthstone throughout the broad land; but what of all this? Are they not our countrymen—our brethren—and shall we not

treat them as brethren; yea, all of them, from the highest to the lowest, the chief plotters, abettors and supporters of this rebellion, as well as their deluded and misguided followers? Let us be generous, let us show to them, and show to the world what a great Christian nation has the magnanimity to do; and let us take them back unshriven to our bosom, enfold them again within our loving arms, without any satisfaction for the wrong and outrage done, or any sign of repentance, save what has been extorted by the stern necessity of an overpowering military force; and let us bestow upon them every privilege forfeited; aye, make them feel, not only that we welcome them back to the great national brotherhood, but, by the very plenitude of our kindness, that we now think them even more worthy of our friendship and honor, than when as yet their hands were not sacriligiously put forth to pull down the temple of liberty, and they were not dripping with the blood of liberty's martyred heroes.

Such, in effect, was the by far too popular, cry—such the direction which the nation, led by the government itself, was drifting—ignoring the first great principles of human and Divine justice—and essentially abandoning the eternal distinctions between right and wrong, and all, too, in the name of our holy Christianity.

But out upon such Christianity as this ! It is not worthy of the name. It is dishonored by an association with such reckless principles. It is not found in the Book of God, from Genesis to the Revelation. It is a maudlin sentimentalism, that assumes to be wiser and better, and more benevolent than God himself, who, in his unswerving rectitude and attachment to the principles of justice, has affixed penalty to law, and has ordained that the way of the transgressor should be hard, and has pronounced an anathema upon them that do the work of the Lord deceitfully. No ; it is not Christianity ; it is infidelity ; infidelity to principle ; infidelity to justice and righteousness and truth ; and no nation can be strong, and no nation can *stand*, which abandons these foundation principles ; or that fails, through a false sensibility, or an indifference to right, to give vigor and policy to just and equitable law. The majesty of law must be vindicated or crime will run rampant. The magistrate, to whom is committed the sword, must *use* the sword to execute wrath upon evil doers, as well as for the protection of them that do well ; or it will be wrested from his grasp and committed to more faithful hands, or the government, which he has been set to maintain, will go down under her own weight of accumulated evils.

And may it not be — I know that, at best, we are but poor interpreters of God's designs, and are often led in our ignorance and by our blind impulses to hastily formed conclusions,—but may it not be, and is it not probable, that one end of this mournful Providential dispensation, is, to arrest the nation which has been silently detaching herself from her moorings, from thus drifting off into this dark sea of infidelity, where she is in danger of being engulfed; and to lash her again to the throne of God—that throne whose foundation and whose pillars are justice and judgment? or may it not be, to write anew, and as with a pen of iron, the love of justice and a due reverence for law upon the nation's heart, and thus to hold her fast to her great mission, and to establish her upon a firmer and an immovable foundation? Verily, I believe it to be so; for I am assured from all that I can learn of the character of God from the expression of his will in man's moral constitution, from his Providence and from his word, that He is *the God of right*; and that such is the holiness of his nature—such his love for the right, that he never has, and never will grant mercy to the offender, at the expense of the claims of justice; and furthermore, that he requires individuals, and requires nations, to do justly, as well as to practice mercy. He himself governs the world, and governs the universe by law; and in ordaining human

government—the representative of his authority upon earth—has placed all men under law—not to violate at will, or to violate it with impunity, but to obey; or if not, to suffer the just penalty of disobedience.

There is a story found upon the page of Old Testament history, to which the nation might, perhaps, well take heed. It is in effect this: The people of Amalek, on account of her cruel treatment of the Israelites, and for other crimes, had been doomed by an oath of God to utter destruction. Saul, the first king of Israel, was commissioned by the Lord to perform this work of extermination. Mustering an army of two hundred thousand men, he invaded, with this strong force, the kingdom of Amalek: but instead of executing to the full the command of the Lord, he, for some reason, spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites alive, as also the best of the cattle. But Agag did not long enjoy this reprieve, nor did Saul profit by his disobedience; for no sooner did the prophet Samuel, a more faithful servant of the Lord, learn the state of affairs, than he rebuked the insubordinate spirit of his royal master, and foretold the loss of his kingdom in consequence; and he summoned the guilty Agag into his presence, and hewed him in pieces before the Lord, saying: “as thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women.” Has the so-called Southern Con-

federacy—the modern Amalek—the troubler of our Israel, and the murderer of our children, no Agags spared alive, that ought to be hewn in pieces before the Lord? or that should be hung as high as Haman, a spectacle to the world of the avenging wrath of the Almighty against this crime of high-handed, bloody treason? But would the government have done it? And had it, would all the people have said Amen?

Abraham Lincoln—we speak his name with the profoundest reverence—was the exponent of this government and of its laws. Because of the manner of its administration, his enemies accused him of tyranny and cursed him as a tyrant; likening him in their hate, to Nero and to Borgia. But never were words more falsely used. Abraham Lincoln had not the first element of a tyrant in the composition of his character. Never was heart so filled to overflowing with the milk of human kindness; never was the ruler of any people more paternal in his feelings. All his speeches, all his manifestos, all his acts, prove that his heart was large enough to embrace his whole country, his enemies as well as his friends. The one fault of his character—if I may be allowed to speak it—the flaw in the diamond, was his almost excessive leniency. His heart was too soft—it partook not sufficiently of that sterner stuff, or wanted those Cromwellian, or I may say, those Jacksonian vir-

tues, which shrink not from inflicting punishment, when and where, and according as it is deserved. Even the bloody Agags were spared, and the conspiring Hamans went unhung; and hence, as it would seem, some other minister of the Lord's vengeance must take his place and complete the work which justice demands to be done, and which his nature unfitted him to perform.

But he that has been faithful in so many things, is not permitted to pass away until crowned with still higher honors. Martyrdom in behalf of that sacred cause of human freedom to which he had devoted the strength of his life, and which he had so honestly and honorably served, still awaits him. But his work is done—all done and well done—and the time of his departure is at hand; and by the will of God, by the hand of that miscreant assassin, John Wilkes Booth, he is crowned with the martyr's crown—his name henceforth and forever sacred to human liberty. All honor be to that noble name! It needs no monument of marble, or of brass to perpetuate it. History will not permit it to perish. An emancipated race—a greatful nation—earth's millions struggling for freedom, will embalm him in their memory, and generations yet unborn, shall arise to call him blessed.

The work, my friends, which he so nobly began, will go on. Individuals may die, but the

nation lives. It is God's work, and it will be advanced, rather than hindered by the event over which we mourn. The blood of our martyred chief is not shed in vain. It was a link in the chain of Divine Providence that could not be left out. The purpose for which it was ordained shall be fulfilled. It will cement the loyal hearts of the nation in closer unity—endear to us still more our beloved country—and watering the tree of liberty planted upon these western shores by the hands of the fathers, will impart to it a more vigorous growth, causing it to strike deeper and firmer its roots in the eternal principles of justice and truth.

Let us, therefore, not despair of the nation; though this honored instrument of its preservation is removed. God permitted him, as he did his servant Moses of old, to lead her through the Red sea of her difficulties, and on through the wilderness to the borders of the good land, if not to enter it. He saw it from Mt. Nebo when he ascended. And the Lord, who has led thus far in safety, will not now forsake us in the hour of our triumph, if we, as a people, are faithful to the right. Another Joshua will the Lord our God raise up to go before us, and to lead us on to that goodly inheritance for which we have so long struggled, and prayed and hoped; and the nation shall have rest.



Original covers to Beveridge's Sermon, obtained
from Mr. Paul Cook.

